

The SNP's one-party state

Nicola Sturgeon's government is an illiberal, centralising disaster. Time for a revolution

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Imagine a country where the government so mistrusted parents that every child was assigned a state guardian — not a member of their family — to act as a direct link between the child and officials. Imagine that such a scheme was compulsory, no matter how strongly parents objected. Imagine that the ruling party controlled 95 per cent of MPs, and policed the political culture through a voluntary army of internet fanatics who seek out and shout down dissent.

Welcome to Nicola Sturgeon's Scotland in 2015. The First Minister is admired the world over. She has a few curious notions — chiefly, the idea that the political and cultural differences between Scots and the English are so great that the only solution is to sue for separation. But there is no denying it: she is intelligent, thoughtful and spirited. She has even mastered the Billy Connolly technique of giving a little giggle to her own jokes. Those outside Scotland have the sense of a charismatic insurgent, already looking forward to a new referendum that she'd have a good chance of winning.

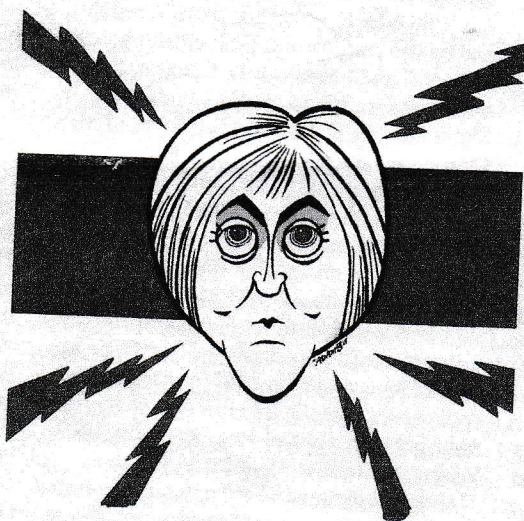
But what is far less known south of the border is that the SNP have been in government since 2007 — and that its rule has been a disaster. Their central premise, that control from Edinburgh is inherently better, has been tested to destruction. Their stream of illiberal reforms and their mistrust of the Scottish people has led to power being centralised to an unprecedented degree. The SNP avoid proper scrutiny by always steering the conversation back towards independence.

For years, I have watched this with increasing alarm from my position as a professor of constitutional law at Glasgow University. I have decided to fight the SNP, and their pernicious ideology, by standing for the Scottish parliament as a Conservative candidate. What follows are my reasons for joining not just a fight for the survival of the union, but to preserve the basic notion of liberty that Scots have done much to define and defend.

The proposal for a 'named person' — i.e., a state guardian for children — is a classic example of what is going so wrong. The person will, in the Scottish government's chilling words, 'monitor what children and young people need'. That parents, families, doctors and teachers do this already is not enough: the state must do it, too. Badged under the

ghastly Orwellian acronym Girfec (Getting It Right For Every Child), the 'named person' will ensure a child's wellbeing is 'assessed' according to the extent to which the child is 'safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included'.

So Ms Sturgeon's 'named persons' will not focus only on harm, risk or even neglect — but the entire human condition. If my child is judged to be underachieving, inactive or somehow lacking in respect or responsibility, the 'named person' can discuss my child not only with the NHS, a social worker or the police, but with bodies including the Scottish



Sports Council and something called Skills Development Scotland Co. Ltd.

The illiberal control-freakery of this measure might have attracted more attention had it been unusual. But it is typical of the Scottish National Party in power. From policing to higher education, the SNP are archetypes of the top-down, authoritarian, one-size-fits-all school of government.

If you want to know what England would be like under Jeremy Corbyn, the answer would not be far off what the SNP is doing to Scotland. Stridently anti-austerity, the party's populist and highly successful general election campaign pitched them as Britain's progressive beacon. It won them 56 of Scotland's 59 MPs. It also helped Mr Cameron's return to Downing Street.

The SNP know more than anyone else what they want to achieve: independence.

Almost all their statements are g towards this goal. For example, the SN that Scots should vote for independence save the NHS. But Holyrood has control over the NHS in Scotland, as i over the whole of Scottish education policing, transport, environmental pol a whole gamut of powers that has been rarely described by the UK Supreme (as 'ample' and 'generous'. Yet in the years in which the SNP have been in p next to nothing has been done to reform health service in Scotland, save that ministers' controls over Scotland's 14 h boards have been tightened. (T motto: When in doubt, centralise.)

This has not led to improved ser The latest figures show waiting ti rising alarmingly. When the SNP c to power, Scotland spent a higher sl of its budget on health than Engl but under the nationalists this has b reversed. The Institute for Fiscal St ies ran the numbers last September, found England's health budget this y is 4.4 per cent higher than before Da Cameron came to power; Scotlan is 1.2 per cent lower. When given choice, Ms Sturgeon has cut the N budget — and protected it from mu needed reform.

The same is true in education. Sc tish schools and colleges are going fr mediocre to poor. Numeracy scor are plummeting, 140,000 college pla es have been cut, colleges have merg and campuses have been closed. The are calamitous policies to have pursued in a economy crying out for a more highly skille better-trained workforce. The SNP's famo ban on tuition fees means that a Scottis teenager from a poor background is now ha as likely to go to university as an English on. And the gap is widening. The decision not t charge fees has been paid for in part by cut ting grants for poorer students.

The rot has set in at primary schools: a the ages of nine and 11, the literacy skills o the poorest are getting worse. Nicolas Stur geon boasts that 'the attainment gap is reduc ing' because richer children are getting worse even faster. Yes, the SNP talk non-stop about their 'progressive' credentials, and how the main reason they want separation from Eng land is because they place greater emphasis on a 'fairer' society. But the reality is very different. Under the SNP, Scotland is becoming